A WOMAN'S LOVE-LETTERS

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Carrie L. Betts
With the Regards of
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Sophie M. Johnson Hensley
Xmas 1895.

A Woman's Love-Letters.

The Fleur de Lis Poets.

A WOMAN'S ⚜ · ⚜ · ⚜ ⚜ · ⚜ · LOVE LETTERS.

BY SOPHIE M. ALMON-HENSLEY.

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A Dream.

I stood far off above the haunts of men
Somewhere, I know not, when the sky was dim
From some worn glory, and the morning hymn
Of the gay oriole echoed from the glen.
Wandering, I felt earth's peace, nor knew I sought
A visioned face, a voice the wind had caught.

I passed the waking things that stirred and gazed,
Thought-bound, and heeded not; the waking flowers
Drank in the morning mist, dawn's tender showers,

And looked forth for the Day-god who had blazed
His heart away and died at sundown. Far
In the gray west faded a loitering star.

It seemed that I had wandered through long years,
A life of years, still seeking gropingly
A thing I dared not name; now I could see
In the still dawn a hope, in the soft tears
Of the deep-hearted violets a breath
Of kinship, like the herald voice of Death.

Slow moved the morning; where the hill was bare
Woke a reluctant breeze. Dimly I knew
My Day was come. The wind-blown blossoms threw
Their breath about me, and the pine-swept air
Grew to a shape, a mighty, formless thing,
A phantom of the wood's imagining.

And as I gazed, spell-bound, it seemed to move
Its tendril limbs, still swaying tremulously
As if in spirit-doubt; then glad and free
Crystalled the being won from waiting grove
Into a human likeness. There he stood,
The vine-browed shape of Nature's mortal mood.

"Now have I found thee, Vision I have sought
These years, unknowing; surely thou art fair
And inly wise, and on thy tasselled hair
Glows Heaven's own light. Passion and fame are naught
To thy clear eyes, O Prince of many lands,—
Grant me thy joy," I cried, and stretched my hands.

No answer but the flourish of the breeze
Through the black pines. Then, slowly, as the wind

Parts the dense cloud-forms, leaving naught behind
But shapeless vapor, through the budding trees
Drifted some force unseen, and from my sight
Faded my god into the morning light.

Again alone. With wistful, straining eyes
I waited, and the sunshine flecked the bank
Happy with arbutus and violets where I sank
Hearing, near by, a host of melodies,
The rapture of the woodthrush; soft her mood
The love-mate, with such golden numbers woo'd.

He ceased; the fresh moss-odors filled the grove
With a strange sweetness, the dark hemlock boughs
Moved soft, as though they heard the brooklet rouse
To its spring soul, and whisper low of love.

The white-robed birches stood unbendingly
Like royal maids, in proud expectancy.

Athwart the ramage where the young leaves press
It came to me, ah, call it what you will
Vision or waking dream, I see it still!
Again a form born of the woodland stress
Grew to my gaze, and by some secret sign
Though shadow-hid, I knew the form was thine.

The glancing sunlight made thy ruddy hair
A crown of gold, but on thy spirit-face
There was no smile, only a tender grace
Of love half doubt. Upon thy hand a rare
Wild bird of Paradise perched fearlessly
With radiant plumage and still, lustrous eye.

And as I gazed I saw what I had deemed
A shadow near thy hand, a dusky wing,
A bird like last year's leaves, so dull a thing
Beside its fellow; as the sunshine gleamed

Each breast showed letters bright as crystalled rain,
The fair bird bore "Delight," the other "Pain."

Then came thy voice: "O Love, wilt have my gift?"
I stretched my glad hands eagerly to grasp
The heaven-blown bird, gold-hued, and longed to clasp
It close and know it mine. Ere I might lift
The shining thing and hold it to my breast
Again I heard thy voice with vague unrest.

"These are twin birds and may not parted be."
Full in thine eyes I gazed, and read therein
The paradox of life, of love, of sin,
As on a night of cloud and mystery
One darting flash makes bright the hidden ways,
And feet tread knowingly though thick the haze.

Thy gift, if so I chose,—no other hand
Save thine.—I reached and gathered to my heart
The quivering, sentient things.—Sometimes I start
To know them hidden there.—If I should stand
Idly, some day, and *one*,—God help me! —breast
A homing breeze,—my *brown* bird knows *its* nest.

Dream-Song.

Cam'st thou not nigh to me
In that one glimpse of thee
When thy lips, tremblingly,
Said: "My Beloved."
'Twas but a moment's space,
And in that crowded place
I dared not scan thy face
O! my Beloved.

Yet there may come a time
(Though loving be a crime
Only allowed in rhyme
To us, Beloved),
When safe 'neath sheltering arm
I may, without alarm,
Hear thy lips, close and warm,
Murmur: "Beloved!"

Doubt.

I do not know if all the fault be mine,
Or why I may not think of thee and be
At peace with mine own heart. Unceasingly
Grim doubts beset me, bygone words of thine
Take subtle meaning, and I cannot rest
Till all my fears and follies are confessed.

Perhaps the wild wind's questioning has brought
My heart its melancholy, for, alone
In the night stillness, I can hear him moan
In sobbing gusts, as though he vainly sought
Some bygone bliss. Against the dripping pane
In storm-blown torrents beats the driving rain.

Nay I will tell thee all, I will not hide
One thought from thee, and if I do thee wrong
So much the more must I be brave and strong
To show my fault. And if thou then shouldst chide
I will accept reproof most willingly
So it but bringeth peace to thee and me.

I dread thy past. Phantoms of other days
Pursue my vision. There are other hands
Which thou hast held, perchance some slender bands
That draw thee still to other woodland ways
Than those which *we* have known, some blissful hours
I do not share, of love, and June, and flowers.

I dread her most, that woman whom thou knewest
Those years ago,—I cannot bear to think
That she can say: "My lover praised the pink

Of palm, or ear," "The violets were bluest
In that dear copse," and dream of some fair day
When thou didst while her summer hours away.

I dread them too, those light loves and desires
That lie in the dim shadow of the years;
I fain would cheat myself of all my fears
And, as a child watching warm winter fires,
Dream not of yesterday's black embers, nor
To-morrow's ashes that may strew the floor.

I did not dream of this while thou wert near,
But now the thought that haunts me day by day
Is that the things I love, the tender way
Of mastery, the kisses that are dear
As Heaven's best gifts, to other lips and arms
Owe half their blessedness and all their charms.

Tell me that I am wrong, O! Man of men,
Surely it is not hard to comfort me,
Laugh at my fears with dear persistency,
Nay, if thou must, lie to me! There, again,
I hear the rain, and the wind's wailing cry
Stirs with wild life the night's monotony.

Song.

If I had known
That when the morrow dawned the roses would be dead
I would have filled my hands with blossoms white and red.
If I had known!

If I had known
That I should be to-day deaf to all happy birds
I would have lain for hours to listen to your words.
If I had known!

If I had known
That with the morning light you would be gone for aye
I would have been more kind;—sweet Love had won his way
If I had known.

Anticipation.

Let us peer forward through the dusk of years
And force the silent future to reveal
Her store of garnered joys; we may not kneel
For ever, and entreat our bliss with tears.
Somewhere on this drear earth the sunshine lies,
Somewhere the air breathes Heaven-blown harmonies.

Some day when you and I have fully learned
Our waiting-lesson, wondering, hand in hand
We shall gaze out upon an unknown land,
Our thoughts and our desires forever turned
From our old griefs, as swallows, homewarding,
Sweep ever southward with unwearied wing.

We shall fare forth, comrades for evermore.
Though the ill-omened bird Time loves to bear
Has brushed this cheek and left an impress there
I shall be fierce and dauntless as of yore,
Free as a bird o'er the wide world to rove,
And strong and fearless, O my Love, to love.

What have we now? The haunting, vague unrest
Of incompleted measures; and we dream
Vainly, of the Musician and His theme,
How the great Master in a day most blest
Shall strike some mighty chords in harmony,
And make an end, and set the music free!

We snatch from Fate our moments of delight,
Few as, in April hours, the wooing calls
Of orioles, or when the twilight falls
First o'er the forest ere the approach of night

The eyes of evening;—and Love's song is sung
But once, Dear Heart, but once, and we are young.

Over the seas together, you and I,
'Neath blue Italian skies, or on the hills
Of storied Greece,—where the warm sunlight fills
Spain's mellow vineyards,—wandering reverently
O'er the green plains of Palestine,—our days
A golden holiday in Old World ways.

Yet would we linger not by southern shores;
The bracing breath of Scandinavian snows
Would draw us from our dreams. The North wind blows
Upon thy cheek, my Norseman, and the roars
Of the wild Baltic sound within my ears
When to my dreams thy stalwart form appears.

This will the future bring. See! Thou hast given
From out the fulness of thy strength and will
This courage to me. Though the rugged hill
Looms high, and fronts our vision, yet our heaven
(I see it when I sleep) with portals wide
And shining towers, gleams on the farther side.

Song.

"TSHIRR!" scolds the oriole
  Where the elms stir,
Flaunting her gourd-like nest
On the tree's swaying crest:
"May's here, I cannot rest,
  Go away, tshirr!"

"Tshirr!" scolds the oriole
  Where the leaves blur,
Giving her threads a jerk,
Spying where rivals lurk,
"May's here, and I'm at work.
  Go away, tshirr!"

Misunderstanding.

Spring's face is wreathed in smiles. She had been driven
Hither and thither at the surly will
Of treacherous winds till her sweet heart was chill.
Into her grasp the sceptre has been given
And now she touches with a proud young hand
The earth, and turns to blossoms all the land.

We catch the smile, the joyousness, the pride,
And share them with her. Surely winter gloom
Is for the old, and frost is for the tomb.
Youth must have pleasure, and the tremulous tide

Of sun-kissed waves, and all the golden
fire
Of Summer's noontide splendor of desire.

I have forgotten,—for the breath of buds
Is on my temples, if in former days
I have known sorrow; I remember praise,
And calm content, and joy's great ocean-
floods,
And many dreams so sweet that, in their
place,
We would not welcome even Truth's fair
face.

O Man to whom my heart hast leaned, dost
know
Aught of my life? Sometimes a strong
despair
Enters my soul and finds a lodging there;
Thou dost not know me, and the years will
go
As these last months have gone, and I
shall be
Still far, still a strange woman unto thee.

I do not blame thee. If there is a fault
Let it be mine, for surely had I tried
The door of my heart's home to open wide
No need had been for even Love's assault.
And yet, methinks, somewhere there is a key
Thou mightest have found, and entered happlly.

I am no saint niched in a hallowed wall
For men to worship, but I would compel
A level gaze. You teachers who would tell
A woman's place I do defy you all!
While justice lives, and love with joy is crowned
Woman and man must meet on equal ground.

The deepest wrong is falsehood. She who sells
Her soul and body for a little gain
In ease, or the world's notice, has a stain
Upon her soul no lighter for the bells

Of marriage rites, and purer far is she
Who gives her all for love's sad ecstasy.

Canst thou not understand a nature strong
And passionate, with impulses that sway,
With yearning tenderness that must have way,
Yet knows no ill desire, no touch of wrong?
If thou canst not then in God's name I pray
See me no more forever from this day.

Shadow Song.

The night is long
And there are no stars,—
Let me but dream
That the long fields gleam
With sunlight and song,
Then I shall not long
For the light of stars.

Let me but dream,—
For there are no stars,—
Dream that the ache
And the wild heart-break
Are but things that seem.
Ah! let me dream
For there are no stars.

Revulsion.

I SEE the starting buds, I catch the gleam
In the near distance of a sun-kissed pool,
The blessed April air blows soft and cool,
Small wonder if all sorrow grows a dream,
And we forget that close around us lie
A city's poor, a city's misery.

Of every outward vision there is some
Internal counterpart. To-day I know
The blessedness of living, and the glow
Of life's dear spring-tide. I can bid thee come
In thought and wander where the fields are fair
With bursting life, and I, rejoicing, there.

Yet have I passed, Beloved, through the vale
Of dark dismay, and felt the dews of death
Upon my brow, have measured out my breath

Counting my hours of joy, as misers quail
At every footfall in the quiet night
And clutch their gold and count it in affright.

I learned new lessons in that school of fear,
Life took a fresh perspective; sad and brave
The view is from the threshold of the grave.
In that long, backward glance I saw her clear
From fogs of gathering night, and all the show
Of small things that seemed great a while ago.

Our dreams of fame, the stubborn power we call
Our self-respect, our hopes of worldly good,
Our jealousies and fears, how in the flood
Of this new light they faded, poor and small;

Showing our pettiness beside God's truth,
Besides His age our poor, unlearned youth.

The earth yearns forth, impatient for the days
Of its maturity, the ample sweets
Of Summer's fulness; and its great heart beats
With a fierce restlessness, for Spring delays
Seeing her giddy reign end all too soon,
Her bud-crown ravished by the hand of June.

And I,—I shall be happy,—promise me
This one small thing, Beloved, for I long
For happiness as the caged bird for song.
Not where four walls close in the melody
I want the fresh, sweet air, the water's gush,
The strong, sane life with thee, the summer hush.

A Song of Dawn

In the east a lightening;
Where the woods are chill
Moves an unseen finger,
Wakes a sudden thrill;

In my soul a glimmer,
Hush! no words are heard!
In heart-ambush hidden
Chirrup of a bird;

Tremble heart and forest
Like a frightened fawn,
Gleam the distant tree-tops,
Hither comes the dawn!

Weariness

This April sun has wakened into cheer
The wintry paths of thought, and tinged with gold
These threadbare leaves of fancy brown and old.
This is for us the wakening of the year
And May's sweet breath will draw the waiting soul
To where in distance lies the longed-for goal.

The summer life will still all questioning,
The leaves will whisper peace, and calm will be
The wild, vast, blue, illimitable sea.
And we shall hush our murmurings, and bring
To Nature, green below and blue above,
A whole life's worshipping, a whole life's love.

We will not speak of sometime fretting fears,
We will not think of aught that may arise
In future hours to cloud our golden skies.
Some souls there are who love their woes and tears,
Gaining their joy by contrast, but for thee
And me, Beloved, peace is ecstasy.

It was not always so, there was a time
When I would choose the rocky mountain way,
And climb the hills of doubt to find the day.
Fresh effort brought fresh zest, and winter's rime
Chilled not but crowned endeavor, and the heat
Of summer thrilled, and made the pulses beat.

But now I am so weary that I turn
From labor with a shudder, and from pain

As from an enemy; I see no gain
In suffering, and cleansing fires must burn
As keenly as desire, so let me know
Quiet with thee, and twilight's afterglow.

I, who have boasted of my strength and will,
And ventured daring flights, and stood alone
In fearless, flushed defiance, I have grown
Humble, and seek another hand to fill
Life's cup, and other eyes to pierce the skies
Of Wisdom's dear, sad, mighty mysteries.

Ah! I will lie so quiet in thine arms
I will not stir thee; and thy whisperings
Shall teach me patience, and so many things
I have not learned as yet. And all alarms
Will melt in peace when, safe from tempest's rage
My wind-tossed ship has found its anchorage.

A Song of Rest

The world may rage without,
Quiet is here;
Statesmen may toil and shout,
Cynics may sneer;
The great world—let it go—
June warmth be March's snow,
I care not—be it so
Since I am here.

Time was when war's alarm
Called for a fear,
When sorrow's seeming harm
Hastened a tear;
Naught care I now what foe
Threatens, for scarce I know
How the year's seasons go
Since I am here.

This is my resting-place
Holy and dear,
Where Pain's dejected face
May not appear.
This is the world to me,
Earth's woes I will not see
But rest contentedly
Since I am here.

Is't your voice chiding, Love,
My mild career?
My meek abiding, Love,
Daily so near?
"Danger and loss" to me?
Ah, Sweet, I fear to see
No loss but loss of *Thee*
And I am here.

Death

If days should pass without a written word
To tell me of thy welfare, and if days
Should lengthen out to weeks, until the maze
Of questioning fears confused me, and I heard
Life-sounds as echoes; and one came and said
After these weeks of waiting: "He is dead!"

Though the quick sword had found the vital part,
And the life-blood must mingle with the tears,
I think that, as the dying soldier hears
The cries of victory, and feels his heart

Surge with his country's triumph-hour, I could
Hope bravely on, and feel that God was good.

I could take up my thread of life again
And weave my pattern though the colors were
Faded forever. Though I might not dare
Dream often of thee, I should know that when
Death came to thee upon thy lips my name
Lingered, and lingers ever without blame.

Aye, lingers ever. Though we may not know
Much that our spirits crave, yet is it given
To us to feel that in the waiting Heaven
Great souls are greater, and if God bestow
A mighty love He will not let it die
Through the vast ages of eternity.

But if some day the bitter knowledge swept
Down on my life,—bearing my treasured freight
To founder on the shoals of scorn,—what Fate
Smiling with awful irony had kept
Till life grew sweeter,—that my god was clay,
That 'neath thy strength a lurking weakness lay;

That thou, whom I had deemed a man of men
Faulty, as great men are, but with no taint
Of baseness,—with those faults that shew the saint
Of after days, perhaps,—wert even then
When first I loved thee but a spreading tree
Whose leaves shewed not its roots' deformity;

I should not weep, for there are wounds that lie
Too deep for tears,—and Death is but a friend
Who loves too dearly, and the parting end
Of Love's joy-day a paltry pain, a cry
To God, then peace,—beside the torturing grief
When honor dies, and trust, and soul's belief.

Travellers have told that in the Java isles
The upas-tree breathes its dread vapor out
Into the air; there needs no hand about
Its branches for the poison's deadly wiles
To work a strong man's hurt, for there is death
Envenomed, noisome, in his every breath.

So would I breathe thy poison in my soul,
Till all that had been wholesome, pure, and true
Shewed its decay, and stained and wasted grew.

Though sundered as the distant Northern Pole
From his far sister, I should bear thy blight
Upon me as I passed into the night.

Didst dream thy truth and honor meant so much
To me, Dear Heart? Oh! I am full of tears
To-night, of longing love and foolish fears.
Would I might see thee, know thy tender touch,
For Time is long, and though I may not will
To question Fate, I am a woman still.

Battle Song

CLEAR sounds the call on high:
"To arms and victory!"
Brave hearts that win or die,
Dying, may win;
Proudly the banners wave,
What though the goal's the grave?
Death cannot harm the brave,—
Through death they win.

Softly the evening hush
Stilling strife's maddened rush
Cools the fierce battle flush,—
See the day die;
A thousand faces white
Mirror the cold moonlight
And glassy eyes are bright
With Victory.

Content

I HAVE been wandering where the daisies grow,
Great fields of tall, white daisies, and I saw
Them bend reluctantly, and seem to draw
Away in pride when the fresh breeze would blow
From timothy and yellow buttercup,
So by their fearless beauty lifted up.

Yet must they bend at the strong breeze's will,
Bright, flawless things, whether in wrath he sweep
Or, as oftimes, in mood caressing, creep
Over the meadows and adown the hill.
So Love in sport or truth, as Fates allow,
Blows over proud young hearts and bids them bow.

So beautiful is it to live, so sweet
To hear the ripple of the bobolink,
To smell the clover blossoms white and pink,
To feel oneself far from the dusty street,
From dusty souls, from all the flare and fret
Of living, and the fever of regret.

I have grown younger; I can scarce believe
It is the same sad woman full of dreams
Of seven short weeks ago, for now it seems
I am a child again, and can deceive
My soul with daisies, plucking one by one
The petals dazzling in the noonday sun.

Almost with old-time eagerness I try
My fate, and say: "un peu," a soft "beaucoup,"
Then, lower, "passionément, pas du tout;"
Quick the white petals fall, and lovingly

I pluck the last, and drop with tender touch
The knowing daisy, for he loves me "much."

I can remember how, in childish days,
I deemed that he who held my heart in thrall
Must love me "passionately" or "not at all."
Poor little wilful ignorant heart that prays
It knows not what, and heedlessly demands
The best that life can give with outstretched hands!

Now I am wiser, and have learned to prize
Peace above passion, and the summer life
Here with the flowers above the ceaseless strife
Of armed ambitions. They alone are wise
Who know the daisy-secrets, and can hold
Fast in their eager hands her heart of gold.

Sea-Song.

A DASH of spray,
A weed-browned way,—
My ship's in the bay,
In the glad blue bay,—
The wind's from the west
And the waves have a crest,
But my bird's in the nest
And my ship's in the bay!

At dawn to stand
Soft hand to hand,
Bare feet on the sand,—
On the hard brown sand,—
To wait, dew-crowned,
For the tarrying sound
Of a keel that will ground
On the scraping sand.

A glad surprise
In the wind-swept skies
Of my wee one's eyes,—
Those wondering eyes.
He will come, my sweet,
And will haste to meet
Those hurrying feet
And those sea-blue eyes.

I know the day
Must weary away,
And my ship's in the bay,—
In the clear, blue bay,—
Ah! there's wind in the west,
For the waves have a crest,
But my bird's in the nest
And my ship's in the bay!

Gratitude

THERE are some things, dear Friend, are easier far
To say in written words than when we sit
Eye answering eye, or hand to hand close knit.
Not that there is between us any bar
Of shyness or reserve; the day is past
For that, and utter trust has come at last.

Only, when shut alone and safe inside
These four white walls,—hearing no sound except
Our own heart-beatings, silences have crept
Stealthily round us,—as the incoming tide
Quiet and unperceived creeps ever on
Till mound and pebble, rock and reef are gone.

Or out on the green hillside, even there
There is a hush, and words and thoughts are still.
For the trees speak, and myriad voices fill
With wondrous echoes all the waiting air.
We listen, and in listening must forget
Our own hearts' murmur, and our spirits' fret;

Even our joys,—thou knowest;—when the air
Is full to overflowing with the sense
Of hope fulfilled and passion's vehemence
There is no place for words; we do not dare
To break Love's stillness, even though the power
Were ours by speech to lengthen out the hour.

But here in quietness I can recall
All I would tell thee, how thou art to me
Impulse and inspiration, and with thee
I can but smile though all my idols fall.

I wait my meed as others who have known
Patience till to their utmost stature grown.

As when the heavens are draped in gloomy gray
And earth is tremulous with a vague unrest
A glory fills the tender, troubled West
That glads the closing of November's day,
So breaks in sun-smiles my beclouded sky
When day is over and I know thee nigh.

Thou art so much, all this and more, to me,
And what am I to thee? Can I repay
These many gifts? Is there no royal way
Of recompense, so I may proudly see
The man my heart delights to praise renowned
For wealth and honor, and with rapture crowned?

Ah! though there is no recompense in love
Yet have I paid thee, given these gifts to thee,
Joy, riches, worship. Thou hast joy in me,
Is it not so, Beloved? Who shall prove
No worship of thee by my soul confessed?
And riches? Ah! a wealth of love is best.

Song

I HAVE known a thousand pleasures,—
Love is best—
Ocean's songs and forest treasures,
Work and rest,
Jewelled joys of dear existence,
Triumph over Fate's resistance,
But to prove, through Time's wide distance,
Love is best.

Prayer

I stood upon a hill, and watched the death
Of the day's turmoil. Still the glory spread
Cloud-top to cloud-top, and each rearing head
Trembled to crimson. So a mighty breath
From some wild Titan in a rising ire
Might kindle flame in voicing his desire.

Soft stirred the evening air; the pine-crowned hills
Glowed in an answering rapture where the flush
Grew to a blood-drop, and the vesper hush
Moved in my soul, while from my life all ills
Faded and passed away. God's voice was there
And in my heart the silence was a prayer.

There was a day when to my fearfulness
Was born a joy, when doubt was swept afar
A shadow and a memory, and a star
Gleamed in my sky more bright for the distress.
The stillness breathed thanksgiving, and the air
Wafted, methought, the incense of a prayer.

Heaven sets no bounds of bead-roll or appeal;
And when the fiery heart with mute embrace
Bends, tremblingly, but for a moment's space
It needs no words that cry, no limbs that kneel.
As meteors flash, so, in a moment's light,
Life, darting forth, touches the Infinite.

All my prayers wordless? Nay, I can recall
A night not so long past but that each thought

Lives at this hour, and throbs again unsought
When Silence broods, and Night's chill shadows fall;
Then Darkness' thousand pulses thrilled and stirred
With the dear grace of a remembered word;

And I was still, thy voice enshrouding me.
Like the strong sweep of ocean-breath the power
Of one resistless thought transformed my hour
Of love-dreams to a fear. All hopelessly
I knew love's impotence, and my despair
Stretched soul-hands forth, and quivered to a prayer.

My passionate heart cried out: "If his dear life
Through stress of keen temptation merits aught
Of penance or requital, be it wrought
Upon *my* life. If only through the strife

Is won the peace, through drudgery the gain,
Give him the issue, and to me the pain!"

Some day, in our soul's course o'er trackless lands,
Swayed oft by adverse winds, or swept along
In Fate's wild current with the fluttering throng
Towards Sin's engulfing maelstrom, spirit hands
Will brace our trembling wings, and through the night
Point and upbear in our last trembling flight.

Song

Red gleams the mountain ridge,
  Slow the stream creeps
Under the old bent bridge,
  And labor sleeps.

There are no restless birds,
  No leaves that stir,
Dusk her gray mantle girds,
  Night's harbinger.

The storm-soul's change and start
  Pause, lull, and cease;
In my unquiet heart
  Is born a peace.

Loneliness

Dear, I am lonely, for the bay is still
As any hill-girt lake; the long brown beach
Lies bare and wet. As far as eye can reach
There is no motion. Even on the hill
Where the breeze loves to wander I can see
No stir of leaves, nor any waving tree.

There is a great red cliff that fronts my view
A bare, unsightly thing; it angers me
With its unswerving grim monotony.
The mackerel weir, with branching boughs askew
Stands like a fire-swept forest, while the sea
Laps it, with soothing sighs, continually.

There are no tempests in this sheltered bay,
The stillness frets me, and I long to be
Where winds sweep strong and blow tempestuously,
To stand upon some hill-top far away
And face a gathering gale, and let the stress
Of Nature's mood subdue my restlessness.

An impulse seizes me, a mad desire
To tear away that red-browed cliff, to sweep
Its crest of trees and huts into the deep;
To force a gap by axe, or storm, or fire,
And let rush in with motion glad and free
The rolling waves of the wild wondrous sea.

Sometimes I wonder if I am the child
Of calm, law-loving parents, or a stray
From some wild gypsy camp. I cannot stay
Quiet among my fellows; when this wild
Longing for freedom takes me I must fly
To my dear woods and know my liberty.

It is this cringing to a social law
That I despise, these changing, senseless forms
Of fashion! And until a thousand storms
Of God's impatience shall reveal the flaw
In man's pet system, he will weave the spell
About his heart and dream that all is well.

Ah! Life is hard, Dear Heart, for I am left
To battle with my old-time fears alone
I must live calmly on, and make no moan
Though of my hoped-for happiness bereft.
Thou wilt not come, and still the red cliff lies
Hiding my ocean from these longing eyes.

Sea-Song

It sings to me, it sings to me,
The shore-blown voice of the blithesome sea!
Of its world of gladness all untold,
Of its heart of green, and its mines of gold,
And desires that leap and flee.

It moans to me, it moans to me!
The storm-stirred voice of the restive sea!
Of the vain dismay and the yearning pain
For hopes that will never be born again
From the womb of the wavering sea.

It calls to me, it calls to me,
The luring voice of the rebel sea!
And I long with a love that is born of tears
For the wild fresh life, and the glorying fears,
For the quest and the mystery.

It wails to me, it wails to me,
Of the deep dark graves in the yawning sea ;
And I hear the voice of a boy that is gone.
But the lad sleeps sound till the judgment-dawn
In the heart of the wind-swept sea.

Incompleteness

Since first I met thee, Dear, and long before
I knew myself beloved, save by the sense
All women have, a shadowy confidence
Half-fear, that *feels* its bliss nor asks for more,
I have learned new desires, known Love's distress
Sounded the deepest depths of loneliness.

I was a child at heart, and lived alone,
Dreaming my dreams, as children may, at whiles,
Between their hours of play, and Earth's broad smiles
Allured my heart, and ocean's marvellous tone
Woke no strange echoes, and the woods' complain
Made chants sonorous, stirred no thoughts of pain.

And if, sometimes, dear Nature spoke to me
In tones mysterious, I had learned so much
Dwelling beside her daily, that her touch
Made me discerning. Though I might not see
Her purpose nor her meaning, I had part
In the proud throbbing of that mighty heart.

But now the earth has put a tiring-cloth
About her face; even in the mountains' cheer
There is a lack, and in the sea a fear,
The glad, rash sea, whose every mood, if wroth
Or soothing mild, is dear to me as are
Joy's new-born kisses on the lips of Care.

Since I have known thee, Dear, all life has grown
An expectation. As the swelling grain
Trembles to harvesting, and earth in pain
Travails till Spring is born, so felt alone

Is the dumb reaching out of things unborn,
The night's gray promise of the amber morn.

I long to taste my pleasures through thy lips,
To sail with thee o'er foaming waves and feel
Our spirits rise together with the reel
Of waters and the wavering land's eclipse;
To see thy fair hair damp with salt sea-spray
And in thine eyes the wildness of the way.

I long to share my woods with thee, to fly
To some black-hearted forest where the trail
Of mortals lingers not,—to hear the gale
Sweep round us with a shuddering ecstasy,
To feel, night's tumult passed, the cool soft hand
Of the untroubled dawn move o'er the land.

To swim with thee far out into the bay,
A trembling glitter on the waves, the shore
Glowing with noontide fervor, nevermore
To fear the treacherous depths, though long the way.
Sweet beyond words the sighs that breathe and blow,
The moist salt kisses, and the glad warm glow.

And when the unrest, the vague desires that rush
Over our lives and may not be denied,—
Gone in the tasting,—lure us where the tide
Of men sweeps on, let us forget the hush
Together, and in city madness drain
Our cup of pleasure to its dregs of pain.

Ever I need thee. Incomplete and poor
This life of mine. Yet never dream my soul
Craves the old peace. Till I may have the whole

My joy is my abiding, and what more
Of dreams and waking bliss the Fates allow
Comes as a gift of Love's great overflow.

Song

Deep in the green bracken lying,
Close by the welcoming sea,
Dream I, and let all my dreaming
Drift as it will, Love, to thee.

Sated with splendid caresses
Showered by the sun in his pride,
Scorched by his passionate kisses
Languidly ebbs the tide.

Life's Joys

I HAVE been pondering what our teachers call
The mystery of Pain; and lo! my thought
After its half-blind reaching out has caught
This truth and held it fast. We may not fall
Beyond our mounting; stung by life's annoy,
Deeper we feel the mystery of Joy.

Sometimes they steal across us like a breath
Of Eastern perfume in a darkened room,
These joys of ours; we grope on through the gloom
Seeking some common thing, and from its sheath

Unloose, unknowing, some bewildering scent
Of spice-thronged memories of the Orient.

Sometimes they dart across our turbid sky
Like a quick flash after a heated day.
A moment, where the sombrous shadows lay
We see a glory. Though it passed us by
No earthly power can filch that dazzling glow
From memory's eye, that instant's shine and show.

Life is so full of joys. The alluring sea,
This morning clear and placid, may, ere night,
Toss like a petulant child, and when the light
Of a new morning dawns sweep grand and free
A mighty power. If fierce, or mild, or bright,
With every tide flows in a fresh delight.

I can remember well when first I knew
The fragrance of white clover. There I lay
On the warm July grass and heard the play
Of sun-browned insects, and the breezes blew
To my drowsed sense the scent the blossoms had;
The subtle sweetness stayed, and I was glad.

Nor passed the gladness. Though the years have gone
(A many years, Beloved, since that day,)
Whenever by the roadside or away
In radiant summer fields, wandering alone
Or with glad children, to my restless sight
Shows that pale head, comes back the old delight.

Oh! the dark water, and the filling sail!

The scudding like a sea-mew, with the hand
Firm on the tiller! See, the red-shored land
Receding, as we brave the hastening gale!
White gleam the wave-tops, and the breakers' roar
Sounds thunderingly on the far distant shore.

This mad hair flying in the breeze blows wild
Across my face. See, there, the gathering squall,
That dark line to the eastward, watch it crawl
Stealthily towards us o'er the snow-wreaths piled
Close on each other! Ah! what joy to be
Drunk with salt air, in battle with the sea!

So many joys, and yet I have but told
Of simple things, the joys of air and sea!
Not all these things are worth one hour with thee,

One moment, when thy daring arms enfold
My body, and all other, meaner joys,
Fade from me like a child's forgotten toys.

One thought is ever with me, glorying all
Life's common aims. Surely will dawn a day
Bright with an unknown rapture, when thy way
Will be *my* journey-road, and I can call
These joys *our* joys, for thou wilt walk with me
Down budding pathways to the abounding sea.

Song

Low laughed the Columbine,
Trembled her petals fine
  As the breeze blew;
In her dove-heart there stirred
Murmurs the dull bee heard,
And Love, Life's wild white bird,
  Straightway she knew.

Resting her lilac cheek
Gently, in aspect meek,
  On the gray stone,
The morning-glory, free,
Welcomed the yellow bee,
Heard the near-rolling sea
  Murmur and moan.

Calm lay the tawny sand
Stretching a long wet hand
To the far wave.
Swift to her warm waiting breast
Longing to be possessed
Leaps 'neath his billowy crest
Her Lover brave.

Barter

THERE is a long thin line of fading gold
In the far West, and the transfigured leaves
On some slight, topmost bough that sways and heaves
Hang limp and tremulous. Nor warm, nor cold
The pungent air, and, 'neath the yellow haze,
Show flushed and glad the wild, October ways.

There is a soft enchantment in the air,
A mystery the Summer knows not, nor
The sturdy, frost-crowned Winter. Nature wore
Her blandest smile to-day, as here and there

I wandered, elf-beset, through wood and field
And gleaned the glories of the autumn yield.

A bunch of purple aster, golden-rod
Darkened by the first frost, a drooping spray
Of scarlet barberry, and tall and gray
The silk-cored cotton with its bursting pod,
Some tarnished maple-boughs, and, like a flash
Of sudden flame, a branch of mountain ash.

She smiled, but it was not the welcoming smile
Of frank surrender. As a witching maid
In gorgeous garments cunningly arrayed
Might smile and draw them closer, hers the guile
To let men hope, pray, labor in love's stress
Ere they her hidden beauties may possess.

Deep in the heart of earth where the springs rise,
Down with the sweet linnæa and the moss,
In the brown thrush's throat, where the pines toss
In Winter's harrying storms her secret lies.
Ours the chill night-dews and the waiting pain
Ere we her fairy wealth may hope to gain.

'Tis so with knowledge. Eagerly we turn
Great Wisdom's page, and when our clear eyes grow
Dim in the dusk of years, and heads bend low
Weary at last, the truth we strove to learn
Is ours forever. But its joy of sight
Is dearly bought, methinks, with Youth's delight.

Fate, too, with chaffering voice and beckoning hand
Doles out our happiness; we snatch at wealth

And pay with anxious care and fading health.
We call for Love, and dream that we shall stand
On ground enchanted, but, though sweet the way,
The rocks are sharp, and grief comes with the Day.

Even in love, Dear Heart, there is exchange
Of gifts and griefs, and so I render thee
Vows for thy vows, and pay unfalteringly
What love demands, nor ever deem it strange.
And when the snow drifts fast, and north-winds sting
I make no murmur, but await the Spring.

Song

Joy came in youth as a humming-bird,
(Sing hey! for the honey and bloom of life!)
And it made a home in my summer bower
With the honeysuckle and the sweet-pea flower.
(Sing hey! for the blossoms and sweets of life!)

Joy came as a lark when the years had gone,
(Ah! hush, hush still, for the dream is short!)
And I gazed far up to the melting blue
Where the rare song dropped like a golden dew.
(Ah! sweet is the song tho' the dream be short!)

Joy hovers now in a far-off mist,
(The night draws on and the air breathes snow!)
And I reach, sometimes, with a trembling hand
To the red-tipped cloud of the joy-bird's land.
(Alas! for the days of the storm and the snow!)

To-Morrow

But one short night between my Love and me !
I watch the soft-shod dusk creep wistfully
Through the slow-moving curtains, pausing by
And shrouding with its spirit-fingers free
Each well-known chair. There is a growing grace
Of tender magic in this little place.

Comes through half-opened windows, soft and cool
As Spring's young breath, the vagrant evening air,
My day-worn soul is hushed. I fain would bear
No burdens on my brain to-night, no rule

Of anxious thought; the world has had
my tears,
My thoughts, my hopes, my aims these
many years;

This is Thy hour, and I shall sink to sleep
With a glad weariness, to know that when
The new day dawns I shall lay by my pen
Needed no more. If I, perchance, should
weep
A few quick tears, so doing, who would
guess
'Twas the last throb of my soul's loneli-
ness?

Not even thou, Dear Heart, canst ever know
How I have yearned these many months,
these years
For love, for thee. As the calm boatman
steers
His slender shallop where he fain would go,
Tempests and rocks before, so through
the dark
To this dim, far-off day has set my bark.

To-morrow! I can hear the quick-closed door,
The approaching steps, my pained heart's fluttering,
Thy voice, then Thee! And all the storm and sting
Of bygone griefs are passed forevermore,
Swept from my life as the resistless wind
Scatters the chaff, nor leaves a mote behind.

As long-imprisoned captives reach the light,
And gaze with greedy eyes on field and tree,
Drinking the beauties of the sky and sea
Half fearful of their bliss; so from the night
Of dreams and shades, half doubting, we awake
And grasp the joy we almost fear to take.

Thou hidest in thy warm ones my cold hand,

Reading my soul in these unwavering eyes.
Nay, thou hast known my hopes, my agonies
Through written words, and thou canst understand.
I have kept nothing back of all the streams
Of my heart-flowings—doubts, nor fears, nor dreams.

So long my life has followed no control
But mine own impulse; now, I pray thee, bend
My will to thine, and so, unhindered, tend
My soul's wild garden. I have laid the whole
Bare to thy sowing; and life's precious wine
Is of thy pouring, and thy way is mine.

Song

WHERE is the waiting-time?
  Where are the fears?
Gone with the winter's rime,
  The bygone years.

O'er life's plain, lone and vast,
  Slow treads the morn,
Night shades have moved and passed,
  Joy's day is born.

THE END.

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